

Hobbies

Too much commemorative small change?

By Roger Boye

More and more coin buffs are calling on Uncle Sam to limit the number of commemorative "new issues" just as officials are about to launch the second of three such programs for 1991.

This latest "coin rush" apparently is draining the enthusiasm of many collectors—as well as their pocketbooks.

"A proliferation of high-priced commemorative coins honoring questionable subjects and featuring less than inspiring designs is upon us in 1991," wrote Coin World Editor Beth Deisher in a recent editorial. "But 1992 and beyond doesn't have to be that way."

Coin World wants the U.S. Congress—which authorizes the programs—to establish an equitable process for selecting coin

topics and to improve procedures for determining the number of commemorative coins and their cost. The newspaper also is calling for better coin designs, among other things.

A bill that died when Congress adjourned last fall would have limited commemorative coin programs to no more than one a year and would have given the secretary of the Treasury an important role in selecting the themes.

"Without serious attention and a determined effort to put the U.S. coin programs on a more realistic footing, the marketplace is likely to teach lawmakers and Treasury bureaucrats a serious lesson," according to the editorial.

The government issued about 60 commemorative coin types earlier this century but production was suspended in 1954 be-

cause of poor sales and promotional abuses. Since 1982, the U.S. Mint has conducted 10 commemorative coin programs, counting 1991's three efforts, and once again, interest appears to be waning.

For example, officials unloaded 7.1 million George Washington commemorative half dollars dated 1982—the first program of the "modern era"—compared with just 1.4 million 1990-dated silver dollars honoring the 100th anniversary of the birthday of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Three types of Mt. Rushmore commemorative coins went on sale last month and silver dollars marking the 38th anniversary of the end of the Korean War will be released soon. Later in 1991, silver dollars commemorating the 50th year of the United Service Organizations will make their debut.